

an NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FAMILY LIFE

X "Working Papers"

Action Area: Home Management X

WHAT IS HOME MANAGEMENT AND WHAT IS ITS FUNCTION IN FAMILY LIVING? Home management is a series of decision-making activities constituting the process of using family resources to reach family goals. It is the major means by which families get what they want from the use of their resources throughout the family life cycle. Management in the home is a part of the fabric of family living. Its threads are interwoven because decisions for the use of resources are made, whether the family is at work or at play.

In a free country the responsibility for home management falls directly upon each family. Outside agencies can give aid but final decisions rest with the family.

The following assumptions about management in the home today are:

1. Management takes place in every home. Whether it is good or poor, there is still management. Its quality varies from one home to another.
2. Management permeates all aspects of family living.
3. The number of management decisions increases as the environment becomes more complex.
4. Although one member usually leads, all family members participate in home management, men as well as women. They may or may not be aware of their participation.
5. Children learn management through family experiences.
6. Management can be improved by conscious effort and education.
7. Goals toward which families strive change during the family life cycle.
8. Management is a means of reaching family goals and improving family living rather than an end in itself.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR PROBLEMS BLOCKING IMPROVEMENT IN HOME MANAGEMENT? High ranking among the problems (1) are:

1. Families are not aware of the activities of management, thus cannot know its contribution to personal and family achievement.
2. They are unaware of the total supply of resources available for their use.
3. They are apt to want formulae for using the resources they are aware of, rather than guides to be adapted to individual family needs.
4. They do not realize the need of evaluating results in light of goals of the family in order that they may manage to better advantage in the future.
5. Goals of the family are not definitive or strong enough to motivate a better use of its resources.

WHAT ARE THE ACTIVITIES OF MANAGEMENT AND WHAT ARE FAMILY RESOURCES? The activities of the management process are planning, controlling the plan while carrying it through, and evaluating. (2) Coordination is essential to bring all the activities and phases of management into harmony.

Planning is mapping out courses of action in order to reach immediate and long-term goals. In the home there are individual and family goals.

Controlling a plan in action simply means individual or joint effort in making the plan work. It calls for guiding and directing self or others to carry through the plan.

Evaluating is looking back over what has been done and judging the results in light of family goals.

Management is concerned with the use of both human and material resources. These include the knowledge, the abilities and the interests of family members as well as time, energy, money and materials.

Awareness of possible alternative uses of resources is desirable in management. Within limits, human resources may be used in place of material resources, and vice versa. For example, if money is limited (low income groups) time and energy may be used instead of money, as in making some of the family clothing. Again, if money is limited, knowledge can be used to spare money as in case of knowledge of low cost foods, foods in season, etc.

The activities making up the process of management are the same regardless of the resources used or the goals sought. It is resources and goals that change or vary.

The contribution of management to home and family life is brought into relief by watching families in action. Note the multitude of decisions that must be made in each of the many areas of family need. Look at the rapid change of ways of satisfying these needs as science is applied to the affairs of man. See families' wants change as change outside of the home takes place.

Members of the Sims Family want and need clean clothing. Father Sims must be respectable at the office, the fifth-grader does not want to be ashamed of herself at school, and the teen-ager longs to impress the boy friend on the coke date. How shall all of these individual personal requirements be satisfied with the available resources of the family? Shall the washing be sent to the laundry or shall money be spent for a washer? If a washer, what kind? Again, could the public launderette down on the corner be used instead of buying the washer? Who will do the ironing and with what equipment, and when, and how well? Or shall all articles be ironed? Might not the family substitute certain articles and eliminate ironing of others such as grass place mats or paper napkins? These and other decisions must be settled. They must be decided with full knowledge of the multitude of other types of family needs that require money, energy, time and knowledge.

Home management is a process that helps either individuals or families make these decisions and realize goals throughout all stages of the family cycle. At the same time, it furnishes opportunities for shared decisions. Developing children are given experiences in making decisions about using shared resources. If parents view the children developmentally, these early experiences at the point of child interest and ability become important parts of his framework of learning.

PLANNING IN FAMILY LIVING (2): In every family, every day, throughout the family life cycle plans of action are required. Many families are aware of the need for planning and many are not. For small matters and for serious problems, for short time and for long time, plans shape the course of family living. Frequently, plans are quickly conceived and immediately put into action; sometimes they require more careful consideration and guide action into the future. For instance, a child suddenly develops appendicitis. Almost immediately the decision is made to operate. Plans of action are quickly developed. In contrast paying the surgical and hospital bills may call for careful planning and often adjustment of previous plans and payment may extend through many months.

At any stage in family living sound planning starts with the realization of a perplexing situation to be met or a problem to be solved. The first forward step comes with review of resources that are available, both human and material. Next, the desired accomplishment is viewed in the light of these resources. Often the intensities of several wants may be weighed against each other in using a given set of resources. The final plan then becomes a mapping of the way of using resources in such a way as to get what is wanted. Although all plans must be mentally conceived, they may or may not be written. Effective plan-making involves hindsight and foresight along with imagination and analysis. We look back at what has happened, forward to what we want to happen; we analyze our needs and resources and, in our minds, we make the plan.

In planning the use of family resources, several guideposts can be set up which will make for greater smoothness in the household. For example, plans should be made to avoid peak loads on either time or money. In the expanding family stage the time demand on mother or father, or both, may crowd out personal activities. Adjusting personal activities to family demand may avoid overloads. Money overloads are easily detected in both the founding and expanding family stages. Since no one is able to foresee clearly all needs, buffer time periods or money funds can be planned to facilitate adjustments to emergency.

CONTROLLING THE PLAN IN ACTION IN FAMILY LIVING (3): After a plan for reaching a particular goal has been made, the second management activity toward reaching that goal is controlling the plan when put into action. A plan may of course be put into action with little or no conscious control while it is being carried out. It has a much better chance of success if control is exercised. Some control is a matter of common practice. For example, nearly every home kitchen has a clock. Why? To control the time factor in meal preparation, etc. Control of a plan in action does not mean that some one person is autocratically ruling the lives of family members; it does mean that someone's mental activity is being constantly applied to the plan, checking its success, watching for needed changes to satisfy the family.

What kinds of mental activity must be applied to a plan in action? There must always be guidance and directing of self or others and the principles are the same whether self or others carry out the plan. The distinction between guiding and directing is that, in guiding, the emphasis is on the person who is carrying out the plan. In directing, the emphasis is on the end product or result of the plan and on the techniques used in reaching the result. For example, a mother guides her small daughter in helping with the dishes by approval of the child's efforts and thereby encouraging her to improve. She directs the child by showing her how to handle teacup and towel so that the cup may not be broken. In practice, guiding and directing are usually blended. There is a tendency to think of guiding and directing in families as coming chiefly from parents. In a democratic family it is a two-way or a several-way process. The function is exercised at different times by all family members.

Besides guiding and directing in controlling a plan in action, there must nearly always be coordination. This may be of two kinds, human and mechanical. By definition a family is a group of two or more persons. Hence from a human standpoint the interests of all concerned must be blended in carrying out the plan as well as in making it. From a mechanical standpoint, the parts of a plan must consciously be harmonized in carrying it out. For example, a family of several members is dependent on one family car for transportation on a certain day. As each uses it, he must watch carefully to get the car to the place and time appointed so that the next person can have his use of it. Even the parts of a plan when made and carried out by one person may need to be coordinated in action. A real problem for a young mother might be to fit together her plan for the care of her house and at the same time the guidance of her three-year-old who wants "to clean like Mommy."

Beside the mental activities necessary for controlling the plan in action, the characteristic of flexibility is closely related to success at this stage of management. The person or persons managing need to be flexible; the plans themselves need to be flexible. Even the standards or goals to be reached need to be flexible. One of the great criticisms of management has been its rigidity. Plans were once made to be carried out "to the letter" or else the management was called unsuccessful. Change is frequently necessary for a plan in action. Flexibility is possible only if the manager sees alternatives from which to choose. Fortunately the ability to find alternatives can to some extent be cultivated. Experience in choice making can begin in early childhood at the time when the child is ready to make choice decisions.

EVALUATION IN HOME MANAGEMENT (4): The final activity in the management process is evaluation. It is extremely important to look back over what has been done and judge the results in the light of family goals. Through evaluation of past activities improvement can be expected in the future.

Constructive evaluation involves more than looking at the finished product. The analysis must go deeper. It requires that one go back over the entire process and consider what shall be retained and what discarded. For example a family might find that the yearly budget has balanced neatly. Does this in itself indicate effective management? Answers to some pertinent questions give the clue. Did the plan work because one person dominated--or because all family members were interested in the outcome? Did the family just "muddle through"? Were situations provided so each member could learn from the experience of handling money? Were ideas of the individuals given consideration and, if acceptable, finally integrated into the plan? Were individuals given responsibility for the use of money and were they permitted to profit from the experience? Did the family secure for the money spent those satisfactions most important to them?

The success or failure of the management process ultimately depends upon whether or not the family's goals are being realized. Therefore, goals must be weighed carefully, selecting those which would appear to bring maximum satisfaction. This involved the intelligent subordination of less important aspects to those which are more important. Goals must be evaluated in terms of their real meaning and worth to the individual, the family and the community. For example, a family goal is good nutrition for all family members. In determining how good nutrition is to be achieved the family must consider not only the individual and the family group, but the influence which this goal has upon the world community.

In determining what the family wants, choices are often made, consciously or unconsciously, between optimum development of all family members and the maximum development of one individual. If one person in the family appears to have unusual talents major attention can easily be centered on him with the result that others' potentialities may be warped or unrecognized. Jill, one of five children in a moderate income family, displays unusual singing ability. Will the family choose to encourage Jill's professional training which is costly and which will cause major adjustments in the family's living and spending pattern? Will the other children favor the plan for aiding Jill? What abilities have the others which may be worth cultivating? What will be the psychological effect upon Jill if she willingly or unwillingly accepts extensive family support? Obviously careful weighing of many aspects of the problem is extremely important before deciding.

Because some operations involve many steps, evaluation along the way is important so that beneficial changes can be made which will avoid problems that originally were not anticipated. All evaluation need not wait until the completion of the whole project.

Evaluation is important but who is to do it? If we honestly believe that the family is the basic unit where democratic procedures are learned, then the whole family must have the opportunity to evaluate those aspects of living that affect it just as it had the opportunity to help formulate goals and make plans. This can take place in either a more or less formal family council or an informal huddle. Parental evaluation is probably more swift and sure but it ignores the fact that the child learns through solving problems important to him. An adult does not always see a situation from the child's point of view. However, the parent will want to stand ready to give guidance and security. In any situation evaluation of smaller problems will always rest with the individual but the personal evaluation needs to be considered in relation to group welfare.

The Brown family decided to entertain the local minister and his family. Knowing that the children of both families were of approximately the same age, all of the Browns participated in planning the party and each had a part to play when the guests arrived. After the party was over each one evaluated himself as a host and the family group evaluated the whole affair. When Mrs. Brown found that Tommy was unaware of certain obligations which he had overlooked she helped him to see his omission so that another time he would be conscious of his greater responsibilities. She recognized that management can be improved by conscious effort.

Through this type of experience the family is performing one of the important functions, that of teaching the child how to evaluate. Much learning of this nature can come through the day to day contacts in a family where the need for effective management is an intelligent concern. Generally, it may be said that management ability is "caught" as well as "taught".

How much the individual or family has learned can be measured by its ability to use previous experience and improve family life--the real goal of all home management.

MANAGERIAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN FAMILY LIVING: Viewing the overall responsibilities in home living, the management requirements fall into groups of situations and problems. In all families it should be remembered that the decisions must be made within the limits of available resources to provide for wants and achievement. The resources are either already at hand or can be reasonably assured of being available in the future.

The managerial responsibilities that are present in all family stages but with changing importance, are those that have to do with:

- Formulating and adjusting goals for the individual and the family
- Management of energy and activities within time available
- Management of money with its many ramifications and relationships
- Feeding the family for health and nutrition
- Clothing the family members satisfactorily
- Housing the family and equipping the home
- Planning for educational development and recreation
- Planning for member participation in community affairs --
local, national and world.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How can the philosophy of home management be popularized? At present people tend to think it is a series of rules leading to stiff and inflexible schedules and forms instead of guiding principles to enable people to make their own choices and use resources to fuller advantage?
2. How can families take up the lag that is evident between the speed of changing materials that are used in family living (as science is applied to affairs of man) and the attitudes and activities in the home that go with a past era instead of the new?
3. Can we create an awareness of the changing pattern of usage of family time and energy throughout the family life cycle? What is the change in pattern from the founding family to the expanding family and into the contracting family?
4. At what family stages do the following finance management problems seem paramount: family finance planning, investment decisions, decisions about use of credit, teaching children finance management, etc.?
5. At what stages in the family cycle is home production of food a useful method of sparing the resource money? When is it not? What shall be the family's approach to partially prepared pre-mixed foods?
6. At what stages in family development does the strain of clothing the family appear?
7. Is exploitation of teen age clothing market causing tension in the family living?

8. How will the family stages affect the choosing of the house for the family?

Submitted by: P. Nickell, Chairman
I. Gross
M. Liston
M. Rokahr
R. Bonde
E. Bergstrand
E. Weaver
H. Sinnard
D. Simmons
M. Davidson
D. Dickins

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